

Spring Second Grade Level Parent Meeting
Dr. Allan Gold, District Psychologist
April 24, 2013

Upcoming transition to Bel Aire

- Children tour the Bel Aire campus and 3rd grade classrooms on May 20
- Parent Meeting will be on the evening May 20

Parents were invited to ask questions or concerns about parenting their children as they transition to Bel Aire.

1. What can we expect with the transition to Bel Aire? How can we help our children with their adjustment?

One can consider whether and how both academic and social/behavioral expectations differ from Reed.

Academic expectations:

Academic expectations are not much different. Most third grade classrooms still give weekly homework packets, but they go home on Monday (not Friday). Children are learning routines and developing their responsibility with time management. Children will get laptops to use in the classroom. Academic demands at second grade will prepare students well for the demands at third grade. Students are used to writing a lot; many are not just learning to read, but reading to learn. They will be expected to be more independent, but they are learning to be independent already.

They will need to develop more of their executive functioning. Executive functioning skills are those located in the frontal lobes of the brain. They can be considered like the manager in the brain and include such skills as time management, managing emotions, planning, memory strategies, good judgment, and organization. This part of the brain develops very slowly over time and isn't really completed until the late 20's. Third graders will need help with planning and time management: what do I need to do, how do I manage my time for school work, extra-curricular activities, socializing/play dates, play time (computers)?

Behavioral expectations:

Students are not babied at Bel Aire. Behavioral expectations are high. Students are expected to take responsibility for their behavior. If kids make mistakes, that is a completely normal part of growing up. Students are rewarded (Caught Being Good) for good behavior and are reminded to correct misbehavior. Teachers may give a student a "STOP," which is really a reminded to stop and think about what they did or are doing, and figure out a better way to handle the situation. Parents should not overreact to their child receiving a "STOP." It doesn't go on the child's record; it is really a strategy to get the child to think

about their actions and correct them in the future. We expect parents to understand that we do our best to find out the reasons for misbehavior and to investigate in order to hold all kids involved responsible. Your support is very important.

Social expectations:

This is probably the area of greatest change from Reed. Students will be developing their social relationships and the influence of the peer group will increase. They will also be exposed to the behaviors and language of older kids and your values may be challenged.

On the personal developmental level students will be continuing the process of determining who makes a good friend. Be prepared for "girl drama." Girls this age tend to be possessive of their best friends, haven't figured out that they can play with more than one other person in a group, and may experience feelings of rejection. Parents will need to listen to their stories in order to help them figure out what to do. A question for parents is how much to get involved in their children's social interactions. At Bel Aire we want children to be able to resolve more and more of their social problems. Help your child brainstorm alternative strategies to deal with a situation. Get information from your child's teacher to see what's going on. There are many resources at school from the classroom to aides to counselor/psychologist to help kids with social issues. We want kids to develop age-appropriate independence. This does not mean that if there is a continuing problem where there is excessive teasing, for example, that parents can't get involved with each other, but try to let kids develop the problem solving skills that they will need from now on in life. Boys, too, can have social problems, but they are generally less dramatic than girls.

By 8 years old, children are out of the egocentric phase – they are now beginning to know themselves. They are much more aware of what other's may think of them and how they do or do not fit in. When they are a little bit different, they are beginning to notice it and may be feeling uncomfortable with those differences. On the one hand they need to learn how to fit in with different groups of children, but they don't have to act in ways that are really not who they are. Parents can help by teaching them to ask themselves: Who am I comfortable with? Ask them: What kind of kids do you like? What makes a good friend? Talk about how YOU do it - figure out whom to talk to at a dinner party, etc.

Popularity and cliques will emerge at Bel Aire. Parents will need to help their children figure out whom to be friends with. This leads to other questions:

2. Are our children growing up too fast? How much do you impose your own family values vs. how do you let them be their own person?

As children grow they mature at different rates, develop different interests, and express different values. Some of these expressions may conflict with your own values. It is not unusual for kids this age to judge each other by the clothes they wear, how much money they have, the type of house they live in, how smart

they are, how athletic, etc. Your child may gravitate to children who have more than they do and want more themselves. You may be in the position of having to explain why you can't give them everything they want. You may see behaviors that you don't approve of when they associate with particular friends.

In order to teach and confront your child, it is **CRITICAL** that you are **CLEAR** on your values! If there are two parents, it is important to discuss any value differences before talking to your child. Children have a way of stirring up value conflicts that parents either never thought about or thought were resolved a long time ago. Children are also very adept at detecting differences between parent views and manipulating those differences to their own advantage. If parents can resolve value differences in important parenting issues, then family counseling can be very helpful. Once you (and your spouse) are clear on your values, you don't have to be afraid about expressing them to your child. For example: in our family we need to save money and not just buy every new game that you want; clothes and fashion are fun, but we don't judge people just by what they wear; we are fortunate to have a home and food, and are able to do many things, but we are not as wealthy as some people, and there are many people who are not as fortunate as we are. Values often are in conflict, so sorting them out can be difficult – what is more important, being well liked and popular, or learning that you can't have everything you want?

It is very important to recognize children's own personalities and interests and not always impose your own interests on them. But basic values of respect, kindness, etc. should be communicated consistently to kids. You still have control over whom they see outside of school, so if peer pressure is having a greater influence over them, you can limit playdates with students who are influencing them in ways that are counter to your values. You will need to both question them to find out what attracts them to other kids and to get them to reflect on how they feel when they're with those other kids and evaluate the qualities of their friendship. How do you feel when you're with X? You can state your observations and reasons why you think the friendship is not a positive one.

3. What about computers and their influence?

Begin to watch for addiction to computers, video games, etc. This is more true for boys than for girls. While girls will more likely get involved with social media, boys can easily get overly attached to video games. When you try to get your child to stop playing a game and get a lot of defiance, resistance, whining, and delay, this is a good sign that addiction may be occurring. In these cases it may be best to have a "no games" rule on school nights anyway, and a clear limit on weekends, with the consequence being removal of the computer, if they can't learn to manage this very attractive and seductive tool. What is technology taking the place of – face to face socialization, being outside, family time? If there is a balance of activities, then we recognize that this isn't going away and computer time can be part of the day's activities. Consider also the values conveyed by the games (or television, music, movies). Are you comfortable with a high degree of violence, for example, even if the characters are cartoons.

Think, also, what you are modeling in terms of computer use. Parents often have work to do at night, but if you are always on the computer, that gives the message that it's alright for children to do the same.

4. Should children get an allowance yet?

Children this age are beginning to understand money and should be allowed to experience how to manage money. If they get an allowance it should be divided into three parts: money for spending, saving, and for charity. Figure out how much you're comfortable with giving them a week for spending and multiply by three. They have to save at least a third, give a third to charity, and if they want to use some of their spending money for saving or charity, that's fine. They can learn how to save their spending money for a particular item, so they can learn delayed gratification.

Children this age should also have home responsibilities ("chores") that are not necessarily tied to an allowance. They should be expected to contribute to the running of the household, just because they are part of the family and shouldn't be paid for that. Common responsibilities include: feeding the pet, setting the table, helping with laundry, taking out the recycling, keeping their room clean. They may earn extra money for extra big jobs – vacuum, raking the lawn, etc. Deducting money from the allowance can be used as a consequence for responsibilities not completed.

5. Should we be concerned about body changes yet?

You don't need to be worried about bodily changes yet. Most children won't be starting puberty for at least another year and a half to two years. However, there are fifth graders at Bel Aire who are beginning to look like young women, so you may get some questions. Be prepared to discuss physical changes that occur at puberty, if the questions arise. Formal Family Life lessons (adolescent development) takes place at the end of fifth grade, but kids will have questions about development, pregnancy, birth, etc. well before then.

6. What do we do about food issues?

Dealing with mealtime disputes about food can be very upsetting. Often arguments occur with choice of foods, including foods that kids don't like. Sometimes kids will want to read at the table or behave in impolite ways. Often food and meal times become the content for power struggles.

Parents need to establish some ground rules for appropriate table manners – no reading at the table, using silverware, reasonable listening during conversation. Consequences can be removal from the table, withholding a preferred food item, like dessert, or no food at all. Prior to imposing those consequences, the family or parents and child should meet at a different time to state the problem and work together for a solution. If the child wants more control, then he/she could have a day or days of the week to pick the menu (or part of the menu). Teach the

child to cook or prepare his/her own lunch, if they are not eating what you prepare. They just have to choose something from each food group, so they eat healthily. Maybe there is an undetected reason why there is so much resistance, so with new information the problem can be better addressed.